

“BIBLE IN A DAY”
A Sermon Preached at
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OUR BIBLE – AN OVERVIEW

I want to begin with a bit of an overview of the Bible. We are going to go right through that Bible but before we do that, let's stop and think about, what is this thing we have – the Bible?

First of all, the Bible is not a book. I know it looks like a book, but it's not. It's a collection of writings. It's a collection of writings that were done over centuries and it wasn't all written at once. It wasn't written and then one group of people sat down and said, this is what's going to be in the Bible. It was selected based on years and years of the using of different holy scriptures. There are many more holy writings beyond what we have in the Bible, but we believe that God specifically inspired us to have these writings together to guide us. And it's based on the truth that people found in it. The goodness. How useful was this writing in the building up of the faith and was picked based on that.

The first five books of your Bible were, the fancy word is canonized, picked as the specific holy writings – 500 BC. 500 years before Christ came and maybe even before that, but at the latest then.

The rest of the Old Testament loosely became acknowledged over the centuries after that. There was a special reverence over those first five books and then these other writings came together, but your whole Bible, the Bible that you have now, it wasn't solidified as the official Bible until around 360-410AD, so almost 400 years after Christ we finally said, this! These are the writings that have fed the people of God. These are the writings that reveal the greatest truth about God, and this is what we can learn and grow from.

Your Old Testament starts off... it's got 4 sections to it. Beginning are the first 5 books – the Law, called the Torah. Then you have 12 historical books that tell you about the history of the people. You've got 5 poetic wisdom books, like Psalms and

Proverbs and such and then there are 17 prophetic books. Most of your Old Testament is the prophets, who all speak into what is going on in the world around them.

When you get to your New Testament, it's 500 years later. There is a 500-year gap between the latest thing that was written in the Old Testament and the very first things written in the New Testament. And when we get to the New Testament it also has about 4 sections. It has 4 gospels in the beginning – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It has 1 historical book – Acts. It has 21 epistles, which is a fancy word for letters. It's just 21 letters that were written early in the church to try and help guide people and they put the letters in this collection of writings. Last, there is one prophetic book. That's what we know as Revelation or also known as the Revelation of John.

Each of these sections is trying to answer a series of questions and I think you can kind of distill it down into these few questions.

First of all, with the law, what is the foundation of everything we believe? That's answered by those 5 books. That's the foundation of everything we believe.

Then you get some historical books. What are some stories about struggling to follow God? We get those. We hear how the people struggled to follow God.

Then you get the wisdom books and that answers the question, what are some useful reflections and wisdom on God and our relationship with God? So, they captured those and wrote those down.

Then you get the 17 prophetic books. What words of warning and hope have the people of God needed? Because the basic role of a prophet is to look at the Law and to look at the world and go, "Heh! This doesn't match anymore" and then to warn us about those differences.

When you get to the New Testament those 4 gospels are trying to answer the question of who's Jesus? You all talk about him a lot. We probably should get to know that guy. And how did he make God's will clear?

That 1 historical book is just telling about, how did that early church grow? After Jesus died and was resurrected, what happened to the church in those early years?

Then you get the 21 epistles, or letters and those are basically letters that were written to the churches that were facing difficulties. What difficulties did those early churches face and how did the wise leaders of the church guide them through all the common pitfalls of the faith? A lot of these are pitfalls that you and I encounter today.

Then finally there is that one prophetic book – Revelation and that answers the question of what words of warning and hope had the church needed? In Revelation it's not just a big scary kind of depiction of what the end time might be, it tells us about what was going on in the lives of the church at that time and it gives us messages of both warning and hope to carry into our lives today.

There's an overview, but we're going to dig into it now.

REFLECTION: GOD BEGINS

Genesis 1:1.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. NRSVue

Genesis 12:2-3

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. NRSVue

So, what we have when you first start off, the first thing you need to know is that God made everything. That's the very beginning of our Bible. It says, it's God who made everything. It's a fundamental understanding of the universe to know that God made everything and we need to hold on to that to realize a lot of what the rest of this Bible is going to be telling us.

The second early affirmation or thing that is told you in the Bible, that you're going to need to hold on to for your entire understanding of the Bible, is that God made a promise. God made a covenant with Abraham that there would be a plan. There's a plan that will be carried out. It's a plan to multiply this people. It's a plan to develop something and this promise that God has made, the rest of the scriptures, the people of God wrestled with, how was this promise going to be maintained. With all the threats and the bad things happening, how is God going to keep this promise? This sets the stage for everything that comes after in your Bible.

God created everything and God has established a covenant, a relationship with us and something is going to happen. Something is going to come of that.

REFLECTION: GOD'S PLANS

Genesis 50:20.

Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. NRSVue

Exodus 34:6-7.

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation. NRSVue

So, okay! Here's the thing. God has a plan. God has made a promise, but as people have started to experience life, they're like, how is this plan going to be maintained? Because we realize we don't always do well, and it seems we mess things up and through the book of Genesis we see a series of stories that we went over last week of people messing things up. I told you last week you could take that verse, chapter 50, verse 20, highlight it in your Bible cause it summarizes most of the rest of what you have in your Bible. Because even what we intend for evil, God can intend for good. God's plans are going to move, and you might have other plans, but God's plans can always overcome that, transform that, shape whatever it is that we have put together. But even what we intend for evil, God can intend for good so that numerous people might be blessed, even to this day.

These scriptures here reveal to us that in the course of the Bible, that yes, it seems like the plans go a rye and there are threats to this covenant, this promise that God has had for us, but God can intend for good to come out of whatever comes along.

In Exodus we get this passage that says, this is a God who is filled with such incredible grace and patience, and forgiveness, but the carrying out of these plans is not just grace, it also involves justice because this God is going to do grace. But this God is also going to do justice and this becomes a point of tension that gets carried throughout the rest of particularly the Old Testament scriptures where it's saying, okay, I know that God has plans and there are plans for grace, but there is also justice

in what happens and what is that balance going to be? How is this God who has created everything and has a promise, a plan that is going to be carried? How will this God use grace versus justice to keep that plan going? What will the balance be like? How will I experience that? What does that mean for me? What does that mean for my family? My friends? My people? My country? My world? At this point in the scriptures, this is all held in tension. We're not sure how this is going to come together. But what we do know is that God has plans and these plan involve amazing grace, but also justice. Justice alongside that. How will that tension be resolved? You're going to have to keep going through your Bible to find out.

REFLECTION: GOD'S HELPS

Deuteronomy 6:4-7

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. NRSVue

Isaiah 53:5-6

But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. NRSVue

At this point, as you go through your Bible, there is this sense of okay God has a plan and this plan involves the ability to even work with our mistakes and it's going to be a balance of grace and justice, but which way is it going to go. How do we work with this, and God says, "I'm going to give you some help." The people of God looked to these holy scriptures and say, this is not just a rule book that has been given to us by this early law in your Bible, but this is a help. This is God showing you, this is how you navigate this world with grace amongst you. This is how you handle justice amongst you. This law is to guide you. This is a help from God, not just a set of rules that are given to us. Part of this help is recognizing that like you're going to do horrible with these rules. You're going to do horrible about loving God so well and loving people so well and so there is some relief that is going to come. We get an indication in the prophets which way this is going to go. This tension between God's grace and God's justice, how is it going to be handled in this course

of the plans that God has because we find out from the prophets, your transgressions, your sins, your brokenness, the justice for that I will handle says God. I'm working out a plan and one will come, one will come who will receive, who will take all of your brokenness, all of that sinfulness upon them. That is how I am going to enact justice with yet more grace, and that's going to be carried out.

But know this, that what you are called to do in this law begins with that love of God and the greatest help that you are going to get out of these scriptures at this point as it's telling you is the guidance of these wise words that come to us from the law. Your ability to embrace this idea of love and to know that where you fall short there is a plan at work. That plan that began with that covenant that was made with Abraham in one of the first readings we did, it's unfolding. It's coming and if you continue through these scriptures, you will hear what God has done.

REFLECTION: OUR RESPONSE

Micah 6:8

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? NRSVue

And so, if God has these great plans and God has given us guidance on how to follow this and we're gonna mess it up but there is a greater plan of grace that God is unfolding. What are we to do in the meantime? What is our response to this goodness that God has been pouring out to these helps that God has given to us and that's where the prophet Micah comes in.

This passage is often called the prophet's summary of what religion should be. This is what religion should be! What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God. This is what you are supposed to be doing. As you struggle with the law, as you struggle with how you are supposed to follow all of this, how you're supposed to fit into God's plan. The Prophets said, "Look, you all are messing up a lot. You want to know what is required of you? This! Come on people! Do justice! Love kindness! For goodness' sake, it's not that much. Just walk humbly with your God." Humility, to be part of our response as well. Live this out. This is our proper response at this point as we walk through what God has revealed to us through the scriptures.

REFLECTION: OUR MISSION

Matthew 22:37-40.

He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." NRSVue

Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." NRSVue

Well, thanks to Jesus, we probably could have skipped the whole first half of the service, cause he just summarized it. He said, look I'm gonna go back into that Torah with all those Laws and all those Commandments and all that guidance and I'm just gonna pluck two things out for you.

One, you already heard a little earlier today, that you love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might.

And the second one is that you love your neighbor as yourself.

You put that together, basically everything else in the law and prophets have to say comes off of that. The mission that Jesus has given to us starts off very simple – LOVE! Love God! Love one another. You've heard how God loves you. You know this from the scriptures and Jesus didn't come to get rid of the Old Testament scriptures and replace it, Jesus came to complete it. To complete the understanding. To make it clear and so Jesus comes and says, look all that stuff it just comes down to this. Love God. Love one another. This is your mission. This is what you're supposed to do.

Well, there is a second part of the mission though. You love God, you love others and then you spread this good word. You have a mission. Each and everyone of you by being a Christian, by being a follower of Jesus Christ, your mission is two part. One, is to live that life of loving but the second comes with this and it says that you should go out and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, but it doesn't just stop there. We don't just run out with Super Soakers, getting people wet and saying,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You're supposed to then teach them, teach them how to obey these commandments that I have given you. Teach them how to love. Our mission is to love and then to go out and tell others about that love and teach them how to love. That's the mission that we're given by Jesus if we're ready to just go out and do it. It's like we've been given something that we should just go out and tell it on a mountain, and also everywhere.

REFLECTION: JESUS' PURPOSE

John 1:1, 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." NRSVue

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. NRSVue

So, Jesus gave us a mission, and we've heard that already. We have the mission to love. This is the fulfillment of the Law. This is the culmination of everything that has come up in the story so far. This plan is going to be carried out through God's grace. It's going to come to us and we find out here about Jesus' purpose in that and when John begins his gospel he echoes those first words from Genesis, In the beginning, so that you know that from the very beginning, when you heard of that plan, when you were back in Genesis, Jesus was part of that. In the beginning the word was with God. In the beginning God was making these plans that unfolded at just the right time in history and part of what Jesus' purpose was, was to show the full glory, the full glory of God, to give you a full presentation of who God was so that you might understand this God who loves you dearly and will sacrifice so that this relationship can be healed, so that grace can win and grace can cover even justice with the plans that God has.

So, Jesus' mission is to first to reveal that full glory of God and it's done most effectively in this kind of sacrifice that comes from love. This shouldn't be a plot twist for you. Love is at the heart of the message from the very beginning. Love is at the heart of what the law is. Love is at the heart of what God has unfolded over history and what the scriptures have told us up to this point.

And so, God so loved the world he gave his only son. He doesn't want you to perish. Doesn't want you to trip and fall, but this is the vehicle which was spoken about in

the prophet who said, those inequities of sin, that burden would be carried by one and this is the one – Jesus, who has come to save us. This is Jesus’ purpose to come into this world, to fully present the character of God and what it can be for us to be participants in that character of God. And to receive the grace that we need and will transform our lives. This is Jesus’ purpose in coming. It’s a pretty wonderful thing.

REFLECTION: GOD’S GRACE

Romans 3:23-24

“since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” NRSVue

Romans 8:28-30

“We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.” NRSVue

So, there is forgiveness and grace through Jesus Christ and a lot of the early church, as they went out and spread this word, as they followed the command, the mission given to them by Jesus, to live this life of love, but then to go out and spread this out to others, as they formed these churches there got to be some confusion over, what do we have to do though. How do I get this grace?

So, we have all these letters that Paul wrote. Most are written by Paul to churches and saying this, this is what the faith is actually about. We took the two quotes from Romans because that was Paul’s greatest hits. He wrote a lot of letters but Romans was the later one and he brought in a lot of arguments, a lot of things he told all those different churches, he brought it together in that letter to the Romans.

The most important thing for you to understand that he received and is now passing on to us, Paul is telling us, that this grace that you want, this thing that I’ve talked about that comes from Christ, how do you earn it? You don’t. It’s a gift. Don’t you understand because when you love someone you give them gifts. When you love someone, you forgive them. You give them what they need to fully receive the goodness that you have intended for them.

And so, if this God is about love, if this law is about love, if this whole great plan that is being unfolded is about love, then guess what? You're loved and this grace is not something that you are going to have to jump over hurdles for. It's a gift. It's a gift.

And again and again in the letters this is emphasized to the people and as they try to put up other barriers, no, no, no, no, no, no. It's a gift. It's a gift. And it says in Romans 8, this has been part of the plan the whole time. It tells you this is something that God has ordained long ago to happen. These plans to send out this love and this grace to the people, it's part of the great big plan. And this grace is not just a 'get out of jail' free card. It's not just a you're forgiven so the bad stuff won't happen to you. You don't have to face justice.

It's also meant to transform us, not just get us out of trouble, but it changes us. It transforms us. It says right here, those whom he called he's also justified, and those whom he justified, he also glorified. The whole idea is that as we glorify God by living out this love that the prophets begged us to be a part of, and that Jesus finally showed us how and then gave us an avenue in for it fully that this love that you are meant to be a part of, it's going to change you. When you receive this mission and act out this grace, this life of faith that's being unfolded for you through these holy writings, it's going to change who you are by participating in it.

And so, as God is glorified, so you too are glorified because you are in that same mission. It seems almost wrong to say, "Oh, but we're glorified too." But it says it right there in scriptures. You are brought into the glory of God. You become participants in this grace. This is wonderful. This is beautiful. This is amazing.

REFLECTION: OUR GOOD NEWS

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

"For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received; that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures." NRSVue

Revelation 21:3-4

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning

and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” NRSVue

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

This is the good news, and it says here in this letter that I’m handing this on to you as of first importance. This is the important part of the good news which fuels your gratitude, which enables you to live into this grace and it is this that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures. That he died and was raised from the dead in accordance with the scriptures. What he is trying to say in these letters is that this plan that has been unfolding, this thing that started with a God who made everything out of nothing and made a covenant, made a promise and worked it out through a balance of grace and justice in which God leaned in and said, “I’m gonna lean the scales on grace, away from justice, for you.” This plan that’s been revealed. This love that the prophets have called you into again and again, the wisdom that was meant to guide you and then Jesus who came to give you the fullness of it. Realize this, it has been brought to a completion. It has been brought to a fullness through what Jesus did on the cross.

This is your good news that Jesus lived, showed us what love could be like, that Jesus died to take on your iniquities, your sin as the prophet said that he would in accordance with the scriptures. This isn’t some crazy new plan. This has been in accordance with the scriptures. This has been the script the whole time. Welcome to catching up, people. This is what it is. And it’s been unfolding, and this is the good news that Jesus is your Lord and Savior, and he is the one who has saved you.

And this is not yet the end of the story. It continues. And in Revelation you get the prophetic voice that says there is yet a fullness of this healing. A fullness of this grace. A fullness of God’s love which is yet to come and you, as people of God, you are to be an expectation for this, to anticipate it, to look forward to it. What God has done in bringing about a healing, in bringing about a salvation, it doesn’t end with the Jesus event, it’s just getting started.

Someday there will be a fullness where all pain will go away, all darkness, all clouds, all burdens, there is a fullness to what God has planned and so what you’ve been reading about through this whole set of scriptures that is before you, hear this. The plan has yet to fully unfold, and you get to look forward to the fullness of God’s plan to come. This is the message that the Bible has for you. This is the journey that you are invited into. Friends, this is your Bible.